

England—Laws and Statutes—VIII
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IMPARTIAL THOUGHTS

ON THE

TEST ACT,

IN A

LETTER TO A FRIEND,

WHO

In a private Correspondence, made some
Inquiries respecting it,

AND

At whose Request the following appears in Public.

By a Country CLERGYMAN.

Minima de Malis.

STRATFORD: Printed by T. B. WALFORD.

IMPARTIAL THOUGHTS

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TEST ACT

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LETTER TO A FRIEND

WHO

IN A PRIVATE CIRCULAR MANNER HAS BEEN
EXPRESSING HIS OPINION



AND HIS REASONS THEREON

By a Country Clergyman

London: Printed and Sold by J. B. Nichols, in Pall Mall.

STREET ORY IN THE YEAR 1791

IMPARTIAL THOUGHTS, &c.

S I R,

SOME of your inquiries respecting the Test Act, so much talked of at this time, I confess myself incompetent to answer, so as satisfactorily to resolve you in; having neither books nor leisure for the purpose. Beside which, I never trouble myself with politics, and the infinitely abstruse definitions of the law, leaving them to the great and wise men of the State, whose province more immediately it is. Yet, as the Test Act has an immediate reference to Religion, at least to the principal appendage of it, viz. the Sacrament, I will, according to your request, give you my thoughts it on *impartially* and without reserve.

It

It cannot but be observed and lamented by every considerate and pious Christian, much more by Ministers who have any serious consideration and sense of the sacredness of divine things, how the Sacrament, the Ordinance of the Lord's Supper, the celebration of which was instituted and ordained for the remembrance of his passion and death, is, by the Test Act, profanely and sacrilegiously substituted for a political tool and an engine of State, whereby (too often) Infidels and profane persons come at civil offices and power. Thus a grand mean of *spiritual grace* is converted into a mean of temporal emolument. May not, *must* not, this sin be charged upon the Legislature, which requires receiving the Holy Communion as a qualification for worldly trusts and interests, from such persons as will not scruple to comply with its injunction and requirement rather than lose the honours or privileges aimed

aimed at, and to which they cannot arrive without this instrument of our Lord's institution, and in some cases their livelihood, their all? At this all conscientious Ministers have ever grieved in being obliged to administer it to such as were known to receive it from no other motive, and with no other view, than to qualify themselves for office, and who otherwise would not have thought of receiving it at all. I say *obliged* to administer it; being not able to prove by *legal evidence* their disqualification, being not such open and professed Atheists, or such flagrant and scandalous characters, as might *legally* be convicted, against whom *alone* Ministers have any remedy. Admitting the law does not make it impracticable for a communicant, in some measure, to receive this Ordinance according to its original institution, viz. the remembrance of Christ's death: Yet it requires it to be received
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for worldly ends and secular purposes, contrary to its nature and tendency, and to the alone purpose for which it was ordained; which was to be a Test of our Lord's faithful and true Disciples, not of the King of England's loyal subjects.

I admit it will evidently appear to every candid reader, and impartial inquirer after truth in this affair, that the Test Act was made to exclude Papists *as well as* Dissenters, from posts of trust and places of influence in the State, being known to be disaffected, and as bitter enemies as any, to the reformed Government. Hence the Test of receiving the Communion, *according to the usage of the Church of England*, was fixed upon to exclude them likewise from Civil Offices; it being well known that they were not allowed to this by their Religion, nor by their Guides who deemed it it no less than Heresy. if it was *principally* intended to exclude even occasional Non-conformists

conformists of *all sorts*; other more proper and effectual means would very probably have been taken; insomuch that many of these might have complied with what the Act required without any violation of their conscience or Religion; and frequently did so, out of their own choice, without any view to secular advantage, much less *merely* to qualify themselves for office.

By these just and impartial hints I would not be understood to countenance, or favour the Dissenters in their present wish and application for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts: No, but quite the reverse. I think *we* have as much need to guard against *Dissenters*, as our *Forefathers* had against *Papists*; granting the Act was *made* against the latter *only*: Republican principles being no less contrary, and destructive to our mode of Government, in the civil and ecclesiastical constitution of this kingdom, than popish and monarchical are.

There

There is such close alliance, such inseparable connexion, between *civil* and *religious* liberty, between the government of the *State* and that of the *Church* in this kingdom, that he who disapproves of the *one* cannot be well affected towards the *other*. I mean in plain words, that Dissenters who disapprove of the *ecclesiastical*, cannot be well wishers to the *civil* constitution of this realm; much less good and *faithful* executors and dispensers of that trust and authority delegated to them by it. How they can pretend to be loyal and *faithful* subjects, much less officers, magistrates, &c. I am at a loss to know; when their very system of Religion, and much more of Polity, reprobates the Idea of a King, or any other temporal power, interfering in ecclesiastical affairs. They *must* be unfaithful either in their *Religion* or in their *Civil Trusts*; They *must* betray either their *King* or their *God*; according to their own notions.

Does

Does not the very *name* of *King*, and of every officer acting by his authority, excite their contempt and ridicule; especially when it professes the most distant authoritative relation to the *Church*?

Religious liberty they have already, even as much as they desire, and every encouragement and protection from the State conducive thereto. Having *this* then, (which was once all that they professed to desire) why should they now wish, and aspire after, that *civil* power and authority which their own professed principles condemn, and which, if they are vested with, they cannot but abuse and pervert, or at least exercise but in *part*, whenever it has to do with *religious concerns*?

It is to be feared, such will not scruple to justify their conduct and proceedings, however unjust and unconstitutional, with

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the same plea as their Forefathers justified their rebellion against their lawful Sovereign, and the most atrocious deed recorded in the annals of history, viz. *We will have no King but Jesus.*

If therefore the Legislature would still exclude, from posts and places of influence and power, such as are not *well affected* to the constitution, such as *most* Dissenters are supposed and known to be, why not solicited by the Clergy to adopt some other method of doing this than by prostituting, for the purpose, the most sacred thing in the world? It is to be hoped this motion will not be omitted, much less opposed, but rather on the contrary, taken into consideration and resolved, in all meetings of the Clergy *for their defence of the constitution against Dissenters*; being no less *evil*, and *dangerous* in its nature, than the *removal* of it would be, by the repeal of the Test Act, and

and for Dissenters getting into places of power in the State. Other more proper means, more consistent with the nature of the things for which they are designed, may be thought of, and recommended as restraints, to debar and exclude from offices and power such as are inimical to the constitution, than what the Test Act requires in its present form; such as a solemn oath from all who are appointed into offices that they are *sincerely well affected* to the constitution, and are *heartedly resolved* to preserve every branch of it *inviolable*; or some other such means that the Legislators in their superior wisdom shall think proper to adopt. The above-mentioned one, or the like, in my humble opinion, would most effectually prevent *both the profanation of the Sacrament* to purposes it never was designed; a grievance so justly and so much complained of; and *also those domestic contentions, intestine broils, and republican factions* which must

must inevitably attend Dissenters getting into power.

From these observations I would not have it inferred and concluded that I suppose *all* Dissenters indiscriminately hostile to the king and constitution: No; I am so far from thinking this that I am persuaded there are no better, no more obedient, faithful and loyal subjects in the King's dominion than *some* individuals of them are. Neither am I so uncharitable as to think they *are* so because they *must* be so, at least in appearance, knowing it vain, and even impolitic, to be otherwise. Yet when even *these* come into *authority*, and are put in mind, by their *ambitious* brethren, who are not led by the same spirit as themselves, of their *principles* as *Dissenters*, and of their *privileges* as *Citizens*, they will be called upon, and expected to act *according* to the *former*, and by *virtue* of the *latter*, or be accused of deserting

ferting their religion, for the honours or advantages of the world. And it being impossible for them to act consistently, and uniformly, with their profession in *both* respects, we may easily guess which they will think themselves, in conscience, bound to favour, coincide with, and act for *most*, and what consequences will from thence ensue, when they shall have both *Religion to justify*, and *Power to execute* what they list.

I confess a *pious* Dissenter, who, from a true principal of Religion, thinks himself bound to obey the government under which he lives, *not for wrath but for conscience sake*, may, with greater safety, and with less sin, comply with the requirement of the Test Act, in receiving the Communion *in*, and *after the form* of the Established Church, than an Infidel, or a wicked and irreligious person can: Yet I could
have

have no great opinion of the sincerity and faithfulness of either to their *prince*, or to any official, public trust they may hold under him, who could thus trifle with so sacred an institution of the King of Kings; I could expect no great probity, honour, or conscientious fidelity to their *King*, from persons that could be thus insincere and treacherous to their *God*. For he that would not scruple thus to rebel against his *Maker*, in abusing and trifling with Religion, would not hesitate to rebel against his *Prince*, did his interest or humour lead that way.

A man may be a true lover of his King and Country, a sincerely well-wisher to the constitution, and may make a good and faithful officer in the State; and yet have not the least principle of Religion in him. So likewise on the other hand, a man may have, so as to be actuated by, true Religion, and make fully as good a subject, and even

even a *more* faithful and upright officer than the former, yet disapprove of some things whereby to attain the reputable trusts, or beneficial preferments, he otherwise would wish. It is therefore hard, it is unreasonable, and even impious, that the Law, as it does by the Test Act, should oblige the one to be so great an Hypocrite as to put on, contrary to his own conscience, the *most sacred form of Religion*, when he knows he *really* has none, which otherwise he would not dare to do; and constrain the other to violate a tender conscience, before he can enjoy the same privileges and honours as other loyal subjects; and, may be, before he can get to a way of honest livelihood, by serving some office, or holding some post of trust and reputation. I mean here the *pious*, and well-wishers to the constitution, among Dissenters, such as I make no doubt there are among them.

Which

Which of the two evils is the greatest, retaining the sacramental Test Act as it now stands, or admitting Dissenters to bear a part in the administration of government, is a question, may be, too difficult, at present, to determine? In answer to which I shall, only shortly observe, that the former evil, being a prostitution and an abuse of a religious, divine and spiritual rite, is, in its nature, of much more importance than the latter, being civil, human and temporal only.

This query *future times* will best decide,
When you and I are moulder'd into dust.

I am yours, &c.

February 10, 1790.

F I N I S.



